

Hed: 5 People Disrupting The Way We Think About Food

Subhed: From Tom Colicchio to Adam Richman, the true revolutionaries

So often we associate disruption with technology. With [lightning-fast trains](#) and [augmented reality](#). Which is great — that shit *is* disruptive — but sometimes change can be softer. Sometimes it's the subtle shift of an idea, not the earth shattering launch of an iPhone.

When it comes to food in particular, disruption is all around you. (And, no, we're not just talking about the now ubiquitous avocado toast.) It's the reason you ordered a green juice this morning. Your preference for organic, local fish. The realization that \$300 of sharehouse groceries will result in an incredible amount of food waste.

From TV personalities to New York chefs to world famous restaurateurs, Whalebone caught up with the disrupters revolutionizing the way you think, eat and feel about food. We've got Tom Colicchio talking about the need for food policy in presidential elections, Nat Young advocating for a less expensive, modern steakhouse and Adam Richman fighting for the democratization of food — and that's just to start. So, kick back with that (hopefully local and organic) lemonade. We're diving deep.

**Disrupter: Tom Colicchio**

**Resume: *Top Chef* judge; celebrity chef**

**Disruption: Create a constituency of Americans who vote around food.**

The Issue: I've been a chef for 30 years, so, I've always thought about the social issues around food: food waste, hunger, obesity. And what it really comes down to is subsidies — that our government incentivises the farming of wheat and corn as opposed to healthy fruits and vegetables... There's even something called crop insurance that guarantees farmers a set, inflated price for certain crops. So, if you're poor in America, those products — often unhealthy, processed foods — might be the only thing you can afford. More people die from poor diet in America than die of terrorism, so, why hasn't it more of a priority in our elections? Why are none of this cycle's [presidential] candidates talking about food?

The Disruption: Five years ago, my wife [filmmaker Lori Silverbush] and I made [a documentary about hunger in America](#). And I also do little things at my restaurants; I reduce portion sizes and prioritize produce. But where I've been most effective is with my celebrity. *Top Chef* gave me a soapbox on which I could voice my concerns — a soapbox I've used to do one thing: Create a contingency of Americans who will vote around food the same way people vote around women's reproductive rights or the Second Amendment... [My organization] [Food Policy Action](#) creates scorecards that grade elected officials on how *they* vote around food. We'll also go to Congress and lobby against the mega corporation fighting to ensure their pizza gets picked for school lunch, for example, or someone trying to get rid of the food stamps program. Essentially, we disrupt on behalf of the people who can't afford to fight for themselves. It's small wins here and

there — and it's tough to say if we're moving the needle — but I really think food *could* have an impact in 2020.

**Disrupter: Nat Young**

**Resume: Operating Partner, Quality Branded (Quality Eats, Quality Italian, Quality Meats)**

**Disruption: A modern steakhouse that's approachable and affordable for everyone.**

The Issue: Look, I love an old fashioned steakhouse... steak and Southern BBQ are really the only “American” cuisines we have. And where I work, we manage some of the best traditional steakhouses in the country — New York's flagship Smith & Wollensky, Quality Meats. These are places where you can spend three hours celebrating a special occasion or knocking back Old Fashioneds while you enjoy a formal business dinner with coworkers... You know the type. But over the past few years, American dining has shifted.. People want casual, more affordable food... restaurants you can visit every week. And while we've seen that model applied to all types of cuisines, we haven't really seen it applied to the steakhouse. That model's been relatively untouched for more than 100 years.

The Disruption: Quality Eats, which we opened in the West Village a few months ago, is almost the complete *opposite* of a traditional steakhouse — and you can feel that disruption in every aspect of our restaurant. Prices are low (\$19-29 per steak), portions are smaller... The menu gives updated twists to steakhouse classics, like the nitro Negroni we serve on tap or our creamed spinach hushpuppies. What's most disruptive, however, is really our space. The room's dark; the music's bumping... And while a Midtown steakhouse might seat 300-500 guests, our restaurant only has room for 60. We still think there's a need for traditional steakhouses — we're not Uber trying to make yellow cabs obsolete — but we do think there's room for a new *kind* of steakhouse... one where you walk out at the end having spent less than \$50 and feeling like you can come back and do it all again the next week.

**Disrupter: Phil Rosenthal**

**Resume: Host, The James Beard Award winning *I'll Have What Phil's Having*; creator, *Everybody Loves Raymond***

**Disruption: Step away from Instagram.**

The Issue: Let's face it: Cell phones have disrupted everyone's lives. I know I'm on mine way too much, living virtually as opposed to really... We're already cyborgs — half human, half phone. And in my opinion, that transition has an obvious application to food. Instagram is just about the most disruptive thing to happen to dining in the past 10, 20 years. Now chefs have to think about social media when presenting their food... Diners think about photographing their food before they think about eating it... Could this be a triumph of style over substance?

The Disruption: With my current TV show, there are two things I'm looking to disrupt: one, the idea that photographing one's food is more important than enjoying one's food. (Trust me, if you'd grown up in the Rosenthal household you wouldn't take good food for granted.) And the

second is that we all be a little less afraid to try new things. If you look at me — or at the characters I created on *Everybody Loves Raymond* — I'm all about the average guy. I'm no Anthony Bourdain... I'm not going to Beirut to get shot at... So, if someone watches my show and say, "If Phil can eat that, I can," and then they go and try it... well, then my disruption is complete.

**Disrupter: Adam Richman**

**Resume: TV host, *Man V. Food*, *Man Finds Food***

**Disruption: The democratization of food.**

The Issue: There's this prevailing idea that food is the realm of the chef — that it's an elite, unapproachable artform. Just think of all the people who *want* to explore new foods but are afraid to ask what's on the menu — afraid to ask for a description of huitlacoche or langoustine. The idea that you have to be some intense scholar of haute cuisine to know, cook or enjoy good food is just insane to me. Who's to say that fried chicken served on a paper plate by the roadside is somehow inferior to Eleven Madison Park? Or that a mom's creative use of fresh, frozen and canned everyday foods is worth less than what's foraged or fancy? I love fine dining and think there's room for all types of food, but it needs to be more of a democracy.

The Disruption: My existence alone is disruptive. I'm not a trained chef; I've never been invited to cook at the James Beard House — hell, I probably wouldn't be invited to cook at an IHOP. But just because I'm not a chef doesn't mean I'm not a great cook... that I can't champion other great cooks. And while there are a lot of chefs and TV personalities who I really admire — we're talking chefs with a capital 'C' — I'm fine not being one of them... even if my success tends to piss a lot of people off. (People hate, for example, that my cookbook is next to Joel Robuchon at the bookstore.) I don't mind because I'm participating in a revolution... disrupting the idea that food needs to be exclusive to be good.

**Disrupter: Jeff Zurofsky**

**Resume: Bravo's *Best New Restaurant*, former CEO of 'wichcraft**

**Disruption: The de-feticization of food.**

The Issue: Of course, there are major social issues around food — things like food waste and poverty. Things that probably a lot of the other disrupters in this article have already spoken about. The issue, in my opinion, is that there's no silver bullet to fix any one of those things. In order to solve those problems, we first have to disrupt the way our culture feels about food. The past few decades have seen food become overly feticized. We no longer see it as nourishment, but as entertainment. People need to be reminded that food has values that are almost intangible. Like sleeping and breathing, it's one of the things that *defines* us as living beings. It's a life source that shouldn't be idolized. And until we remember that, food will continue to be this untouchable issue.

The Disruption: When I was running 'wichcraft, I always tried to take a different approach to things... a more basic, spiritual idea of the food we would serve. But over time, I've realized running a 450 employee business might not be the way for me to achieve my goal — that maybe I can be most meaningful as an advisor. I now advise 12 companies, and in addition to that I also brought my beliefs to TV, both on *Best New Restaurant* and in a new show I'm working on. If I'm disrupting anything, it's changing the language around food and the way people value the benefits it brings to the table.